

**STATEMENT OF**

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**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE DRUG POLICY AND HUMAN  
RESOURCES**

**REGARDING**

**INTERRUPTING NARCO-TERRORISTS ON THE HIGH SEAS: DO WE HAVE  
ENOUGH WIND IN OUR SAILS?**

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Chairman Souder, Ranking Member Cummings and distinguished members of this subcommittee, it is my honor to appear before you today to discuss U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) interdiction efforts in the “transit zone.”

My name is Charles Stallworth and I am the acting assistant commissioner for the CBP’s Office of Air and Marine Operations (AMO).

CBP, as the guardian of the Nation’s borders, is America’s frontline of defense. CBP safeguards the homeland—foremost, by protecting the American public against terrorists and the instruments of terror; while at the same time enforcing the laws of the United States and fostering the Nation’s economic security through lawful travel and trade. These goals require the closing of our borders to illegal activity such as the smuggling of people and drugs while simultaneously enhancing the legal movement of people and trade. Our border security efforts reflect the operational reality that the threats to our borders have converged.

As legal points of entry into the U.S. continue to harden, the risk grows that potential terrorists will exploit known border security weaknesses between points of entry that are created and sustained by sophisticated organizations that smuggle people and drugs. While the illegal drug trade is a fundamental and major threat to the health and well being of the American people, taking the lives of more than 20,000 Americans each year, its networks, infrastructure and routes may also serve as turn key conduits for terrorist entry into or attacks against the U.S. By interdicting aviation and maritime smuggling conveyances destined for the U.S., CBP directly targets and combats the drug trade while simultaneously denying terrorists a possible means to enter or attack the U.S.

CBP’s border security efforts occur at and between official points of entry. Additionally, CBP’s air and marine operations are designed to extend our zone of security outward. This includes AMO’s efforts in the source and transit zones to interdict smuggling conveyances, long before shipments of counter-narcotics, arms or aliens reach the physical borders.

AMO is the newest of CBP’s three enforcement arms, having transferred from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in November 2004. AMO has approximately 1,000 personnel, 140 fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft and 73 high-speed marine vessels, including 4-engine P-3 Airborne Early Warning (AEW) aircraft, CE-550 Citation Jet Interceptors, 40+ knot Midnight Express Interceptor vessels and UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. AMO’s air and marine crews are federal law enforcement agents who routinely perform interdiction, enforcement, airspace security, intelligence and investigative missions outside, inside and on the nation’s borders.

AMO continues to provide aerial surveillance support to ICE and multiple other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, including the airborne aspect of controlled deliveries and covert tracking of suspect ground and air vehicles.

Through the unique Air and Marine Operations Center (AMOC), located in Riverside,

California, CBP collects and analyzes approximately 200 civilian and military radar feeds from around the United States, Canada and its borders and fuses that data with law enforcement, intelligence and flight plan databases to produce a real-time common operating picture. AMOC has the capability to intake an additional 250 radar feeds at present. AMOC directly supports real-time interdictions of suspect aircraft on the nation's borders and beyond. Intelligence and research specialists there also routinely mine the existing databases for information that could indicate evidence of aviation smuggling activity. This independent research has led to numerous enforcement actions and investigations.

This capability is brought to bear against a substantial flow of drugs that comes to the United States from South America after passing through the Transit Zone – an area used by smugglers that is roughly twice the size of the continental U.S. It includes the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

Current estimates by the Joint Inter-Agency Task Force–South (JIATF-S) indicate that more than 400 metric tons of cocaine move through the transit zone for the North American market. In response, JIATF-S coordinates an international effort comprised of U.S. law enforcement, U.S. military and allied contributions. This collaborative effort includes vessels and aircraft that conduct detection, monitoring and interdiction missions.

By virtue of its unique aviation capabilities, CBP provides a very substantial amount of detection and monitoring capabilities that are prerequisites for successful interdiction. CBP's efforts in support of this international mission directly reflect CBP's extended border security strategy.

In response to requests from JIATF-S and the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator, CBP's contribution jumped from 200 hours of monthly flight time in support of this mission, to at least 600 hours per month – or approximately 20 flight hours per day. In March and April 2005, CBP contributed more than 800 hours per month.

In addition to its substantial aircraft support, CBP has assigned some of its most experienced field leaders to JIATF-South on a temporary basis. This increased cross-pollination has prompted JIATF-S to request that CBP double the number of its senior personnel permanently assigned to that structure. John Stanton, a former fellow assigned to this subcommittee and one of our more experienced senior leaders, will soon be serving as the deputy director there and we are screening several others for permanent duty at JIATF-South as well.

In addition to our experienced people, CBP contributes important assets. The backbone of CBP's efforts in support of transit zone interdiction operations is our fleet of aging P-3 aircraft. We have 8 P-3s surveillance versions fitted with powerful airborne search radars and 8 other P-3s optimized for air-to-air interdiction in service today. These are very capable, long-range aircraft that are reaching the end of their service lives. In fact, they have already given one lifetime of service to the Navy. After being removed from long-term storage, they were overhauled and placed in the legacy U.S. Customs Service beginning in the 1980s. Consequently, these vintage aircraft are

expensive to maintain and our operational availability rates for these aircraft are less than what we would prefer. The average age of our P-3 surveillance aircraft is 38 years old. The average age of the interdiction P-3s, or “slicks” as we call them, is 40 years old.

While old, these are good planes equipped with modern sensor equipment. The Department will soon decide whether to extend the lives of these planes with substantial overhauls or to replace them with new aircraft altogether.

It is also important to remember that when these aircraft entered the U.S. Customs Service, they were designed and fitted principally in response to a different threat than we face today. In the 1980s and 1990s, the bulk of the smuggling threat was airborne. In response, these Customs P-3s were fitted mainly to conduct aerial interdiction with air-to-air radars. Their impact was so successful that, over time, we have seen the vector change from the air to the water in the source and transit zones.

In fact, current trends indicate that only as much as 10 percent of transit zone smuggling takes to the air, according to our experienced aircrew who have watched these trends closely.

Because of the change in mode of operations, we are refocusing our P-3 fleet against maritime targets. And we have had some very significant successes. Acting upon inter-agency cueing, CBP AMO P-3s have just this year detected and identified for seizure multiple vessels carrying substantial cocaine loads. Let’s just look at a snapshot of our activity last September. CBP AMO P-3s were part of the interagency effort that conducted the search and successfully located in the Eastern Pacific last September the following three suspect vessels; the *Lina Maria*, the *San Jose* and the *Cielo Azul*. After boarding by our U.S. Coast Guard partners, more than 32 tons of cocaine were seized.

As this example indicates, the majority of cocaine shipped today moves by fishing vessel or “go-fast boat.” The small, high-speed go-fast vessels are often difficult to detect without advanced intelligence and sophisticated sensors. We continue to examine ways to leverage the capabilities of our P-3 fleet against this maritime smuggling threat. In particular, we are looking very closely at equipping them with a surface-search radar sensor that could provide geometric increases in effectiveness in the transit zone.

That increase in effectiveness is required because we have recently enjoyed a surge in high-quality actionable intelligence on illegal shipments. In past years, we had the assets, but not the intelligence. Today the situation has reversed. We have more intelligence on shipments today than we have assets to detect, monitor and interdict.

We have maintained this focus on our mission because of the enormous dedication and talent of our people in the field and headquarters.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared testimony. I look forward to answering your questions.